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AUTHOR	Rusch, Frank R.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify job site supervisors' opinions regarding job placement, training, evaluation, and job maintenance of persons with disabilities. In order to assess the role of job site supervisors, 10 supervisors in businesses that employed individuals with handicaps were interviewed. Employment sites represented four occupational areas: food service, light industrial, janitorial/maintenance, and warehouse. Job site supervisors were found to be directly involved in providing support on the job. Supervisors' roles included hiring the employee, modifying the job, providing direct training, assisting co-workers in providing employee support, evaluating the employee, and providing incentives to maintain employee work performance. Additionally, all supervisors indicated that they would welcome assistance from a job coach in order to provide additional support to target employees. Includes 10 references. (Author/JDD)

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Evaluating the Role of Job Site Supervisors in the Long-Term Employment of Persons with Severe Disabilities

Frank R. Rusch, Kathleen E. Minch,

and

Carolyn Hughes

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Running Head: SUPERVISORS' ROLES

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Abstract

This study investigated support provided to target employees who have been competitively employed. In order to assess the role of job site supervisors, 10 supervisors in businesses that employed individuals with handicaps were interviewed. Employment sites represented four occupational areas: food service, light industrial, janitorial/maintenance, and warehouse. Job site supervisors were found to be directly involved in providing support on the job. Supervisors' roles included hiring the employee, modifying the job, providing direct training, assisting co-workers in providing employee support, evaluating the employee, and providing incentives to maintain employee work performance. Additionally, all supervisors indicated that they would welcome assistance from an employment specialist (job coach) in order to provide additional support to target employees.

Evaluating the Role of Job Site Supervisors in the Long-Term Employment of Persons with Severe Disabilities

Considerable research has focused recently upon the development of model vocational placement and training programs that focus upon placing persons with severe disabilities in competitive employment rather than sheltered workshops. Recent legislation has mandated that persons with handicaps are entitled to services that result in their working in integrated settings with the support necessary to remain employed (P.L. 99-506). The model of competitive employment that has received the most attention is the supported employment model (Rusch, 1986), which focuses upon persons who will require intensive, ongoing support to earn wages when they are employed in regular work sites alongside persons without disabilities. Although several researchers have described generally the supervision that is likely to occur after a person with handicaps is placed on the job, very little is known about the specific types of supervision currently in practice.

Recently, investigators have begun to identify the types and degree of supervision that are provided by nonhandicapped co-workers as well as supervisors. Rusch and Minch (in press) list advocating, training, evaluating, observing, befriending, and associating as kinds of interactions reported by a handful of

applied researchers who have enlisted the involvement of co-workers. Co-workers are defined as nonhandicapped employees who meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) work in the proximity of the target employee (within 600 sq. ft.), (b) perform the same or similar duties as the target employee, or (c) have breaks or eat meals in the same area as the target employee. Subsequent research has indicatd that these co-worker interactions vary as a result of level of disability (Rusch, Hughes, Johnson, & Minch, in press) and type of placement (Rusch, Hughes, & Johnson, in press). Although studies indicate the same patterns of co-worker involvement with associating, training and evaluation reported most frequently, placement in mobile work crews or clustered enclaves results in fewer interactions than placement individually or in dispersed enclaves (i.e., more than two supported employees working for one employer, but performing different jobs in different locations at the work site).

One important area of research concerns the role of job site supervisors, who typically have hiring and supervisory responsibilities that are critical to the long-term employment of supported employees; however, almost no research has been published in this area. The job site supervisor may be the employer or, in large organizations, an employee who serves as manager of the job site. Specifically, the role of job supervisors needs clarification in several respects. First, employees with severe disabilities may require long-term

support. Consequently, job site supervisor's willingness to allow employment specialists to provide training needs clarification. Addtionally, target employees may require that the job site be modified.

Over the past several years much has been written about employee evaluations (cf. Rusch, 1986, White, & Rusch, 1983). However, the opinions of supervisors have not been studied. Finally, the measures that are taken by supervisors to maintain performance standards need clarification. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to identify job site supervisors' opinions regarding job placement, training, evaluation, and job maintenance.

Methods

Participants

In order to assess the type of support provided to target employees in supported employment, ten supervisors of businesses that employed persons with handicaps were interviewed. An eleventh supervisor had been contacted, but he refused to be interviewed because he was afraid of a possible lawsuit involving confidentiality. The supervisors' names, business addresses, and occupational areas were provided by the local adult service agency responsible for placing persons with handicaps in competitive employment (Lagomarcino, 1986). Located in a midwestern university town with a population of 100,000, the

businesses represented a wide range of occupational areas for persons with handicaps, including food service (N = 4), light industrial (N = 3), janitorial/maintenance (N = 2), and warehouse (N = 1). The number of employees working at the businesses ranged from 15 to 370. Three businesses were small (15 - 20 employees), four businesses were of medium size (21 - 100 employees), and three businesses were large (more than 100 employees).

Procedures

Through a process of literature review (Rusch & Minch, in press) and consultation with four employment training specialists at the local rehabilitation agency (Lagomarcino, 1986), we identified activities that provided support to target employees in the supported employment process. These activities were grouped into four major components that constitute the supported employment model: job placement, job site training, ongoing assessment, and follow-along support (Shafer, 1987). In an effort to validate these activities socially with employers, we developed 16 interview questions based on the identified activities. Interviews included both open-ended questions (e.g., "How have you modified the job to enhance employee performance?") and yes/no questions (e.g., "Would you allow more frequent evaluations, for instance, monthly?"). The exact wording of each question and the activity to which it relates are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Supervisors were contacted by telephone to ascertain their willingness to participate in an interview concerning their employment policies and procedures. If a supervisor consented, a 30-minute interview was arranged at the employment site. The first and second authors conducted the interviews by explaining the purpose of the interview to the supervisor, asking the supervisor to consider all his or her employees when responding, and then asking the supervisor the interview questions. Although the authors did not try to influence the supervisors' answers, they did attempt to define unfamilar terms. For example, the term Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan was explained to employers. Interviews were tape recorded to provide accurate interpretation of supervisors' comments.

Results

The results of the interviews are discussed according to the supported employment activity to which each question related. Additionally, responses that appeared to be of significant interest are displayed in Tables 2-4.

Job Placement (Questions 1 through 5)

Table 2 lists the factors that supervisors identified as

important when considering whether or not to hire a job applicant. The supervisors identified several factors considered important in the hiring process. The most frequently cited factors were presentation and appearance (N = 5) and interest in position, motivation, and willingness (N = 5). Parenthetically, two supervisors mentioned that they were not influenced by a potential employee's need for money.

Insert Table 2 about here

Supervisors in different occupational areas stressed different factors as important when they were assessing a job applicant. For example, both of the supervisors employed in food services stressed punctuality, whereas light industry supervisors stressed hand coordination, background skills, and work history.

All of the supervisors indicated that they would welcome support from an employment specialist. One supervisor suggested that using an employment specialist may decrease the number of practical jokes aimed at the target employee. Other supervisor comments included "very helpful" and "a real plus to get support."

All supervisors stated that an employment specialist would be encouraged to re-evaluate the job requirements stringently. Even

supervisors with detailed job standards agreed to allow re-evaluation of job descriptions. Supervisors justified their answers with such reasons as "job outlines are too broad" and "anything to get the job done."

When they were asked whom the employment specialist should contact for more information about a specific job, 90% of the supervisors named the person who immediately supervised the employees.

Ninety percent of the supervisors placed a great deal of emphasis on social-interpersonal interaction skills in the workplace. Additionally, supervisors placed different emphases on social-interpersonal skills depending on whether or not the job included customer interaction or co-worker interaction. Five supervisors placed greater emphasis on social and interpersonal skills in a job that included customer interaction than in a job that did not. Six employers placed a strong emphasis on co-worker interaction. One light-industrial supervisor stressed that social skills were more important than work performance because "if employees bother the workers around them, everyone's work performance suffers." Another supervisor stated "If people are friendly and work well with each other... it seems to attract the customers." The types of social-interpersonal skills listed by supervisors included: saying "hi" to customers and co-workers (N = 2), complying with verbal directions (N = 1), and demonstrating manners (N = 1).

Job Site Training (Questions 6 through 10)

Two supervisors responded positively when asked if they would participate in a meeting to develop an Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP). Four other supervisors said that they would participate if the time commitment were not great. The final four supervisors were either undecided or not willing to participate in the IWRP meeting. Interestingly, both supervisors who agreed to participate worked in the food service industry, whereas three of the four supervisors who were unsure or would not participate worked in light industry.

Insert Table 3 about here

The modifications of jobs made by supervisors to enhance employee performance are shown in Table 3. The most commonly suggested modifications included: redesigning position (N = 3), changing tasks (N = 3), improving wheelchair accessibility (N = 3), and providing picture schedules (N = 2).

The types and methods of training reported by the supervisors varied across the types of businesses in which they were employed. Five supervisors reported providing from one to two hours a week of direct training to new employees. Two supervisors provided an orientation for new employees that

included a tour of the business site. Other methods of training included: reading company handbooks (N = 2), showing training films and role play (N = 1), and providing training seminars for all company employees (N = 1). Additionally, nine supervisors reported that they would allow keeping records as part of on-the-job training. Supervisors qualified this statement by indicating that records could be kept if company personnel were not responsible for the record keeping.

Nine of the 10 supervisors reported the use of co-workers to assist with training. Most supervisors paired a new employee with a veteran employee who answered questions (N = 4), demonstrated job tasks (N = 5), provided information (N = 3), or showed the new employee around (N = 2). The only supervisor who did not use co-worker assistance reported that, "Co-workers generally should not be distracted from their work to train new employees."

Ongoing Assessment (Questions 11 through 14)

Ninety percent of the supervisors conducted some kind of formal written evaluation for all their employees. Of these supervisors, six used a different method of evaluation for first-year employees, and three supervisors had established a probationary period of 90 days in which the employee was evaluated during or at the end of the period. After the first year, six supervisors evaluated their employees annually while

the other three supervisors evaluated every six months.

Nine of the 10 supervisors indicated they would allow more frequent evaluations. The tenth supervisor, who would not allow more frequent evaluations, stated that providing additional time for evaluation would be a problem and that all company employees should be evaluated in the same fashion. Eight supervisors stated that they would evaluate as often as monthly. One supervisor stated that monthly evaluations would be too frequent unless a major problem existed, but that bi-monthly evaluations would be acceptable. One supervisor suggested that more frequent evaluations of target employees may improve their performance.

Six of the supervisors reported that they had the same expectations when evaluating all employees with similar job descriptions. Two of these supervisors stated that all employees must meet a minimum standard of performance. Another supervisor indicated that a company cannot afford to lower the expectations for any employee. Four supervisors had differing expectations, depending upon an employee's capabilitites. For example, two employers had lower expectations when evaluating target employees.

Six supervisors responded that their staff would not feel threatened if their performance was used as a standard for acceptability in evaluating target employees. One supervisor stressed the need to select a high-performing employee as a standard. Two supervisors felt that observing staff was

unnecessary, because either they had set minimum standards of performance or disliked staff comparison. Two supervisors indicated that their staff would feel threatened if their performance was used as a standard for acceptability. Differential responses did not appear to relate to the occupational area of the supervisors.

Follow-Along (Questions 15 and 16)

The supervisors described 11 separate measures in use to ensure that their employees continued to work hard and perform the tasks for which they originally were hired (Table 4). The most frequently mentioned strategies were retraining the employee (N = 3) and monitoring quality and quantity of job performance (N = 3). Other measures included daily supervision and employee recognition. Two supervisors mentioned that they had no specified method of maintaining employee work performance.

Insert Table 4 about here

Supervisors indicated that parents, relatives, and friends assist employees in maintaining their work performance in several ways. Six of the supervisors encouraged parents or relatives to call to indicate employee absences. In contrast, four

supervisors discouraged anyone except the employee from calling to indicate an absence. Interestingly, one supervisor wanted employees to find their own substitutes if they were absent. However, all supervisors were willing to make exceptions in emergency situations.

No supervisor would allow parents, relatives, or friends to assist a target employee on the job. The most commonly stated reason was that the company was liable for any injuries sustained by persons not officially on the payroll. Furthermore, labor laws were also mentioned as a reason why persons not on the payroll could not assist with the job.

Nine of the supervisors indicated that some employees have parents, relatives, or friends who provide transportation. Additionally, two supervisors reported that with written consent, they would release an employee's paycheck to a family member or friend. In contrast, three other supervisors expected each employee to pick up and sign for his or her own paycheck.

Discussion

The results of interviews with 10 supervisors in businesses that employ individuals with handicaps showed that job site supervisors were directly involved in providing some support, including job placement, job site training, ongoing assessment, and follow-along supervision. Specific activities included hiring the employee, modifying the job, providing direct

training, assisting co-workers in providing employee support, evaluating the employee, and providing incentives to maintain employee work performance. Additionally, all supervisors indicated that they would welcome assistance from an employment specialist in order to provide additional support to target employees.

The results of this investigation support and extend a growing literature that has focused upon the role of co-workers on the job, particularly in relation to the supported employment model. Rusch and Minch (1988) and Shafer (1986) have reported co-worker roles similar to those reported in this investigation. Training and evaluating the target employee appear to be supervisor-related, as well as co-worker-related functions. Fifty percent of the supervisors interviewed in this investigation reported providing up to two hours of direct training to new employees. Ninety percent of the supervisors indicated that they would allow co-workers to assist in training. Similarly, ninety percent of the supervisors conducted some form of formal written evaluation.

There is no published research on the role of job site supervisors in the supported employment process, despite an extensive literature demonstrating the effectiveness of supported employment (Lagomarcino, 1986; Rusch, 1986; Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Lagomarcino, 1986; Rusch & Mithaug, 1980; Shafer, 1987). Prior research has suggested that co-workers who have job

responsibilities similar to those of target employees are the primary supporters (cf. Shafer, 1987). This investigation found that supervisors would allow their job descriptions to be re-evaluated and possibly redesigned. They also indicated that they would allow tasks to be changed, accessibility be improved, and pictures be used to guide and direct target employee performance.

Several areas of future research are suggested by the results of this investigation. Although the support role of co-workers who share similar work responsibilities has been suggested as a major factor in the long-term employment of target employees, it may well be that supervisors also contribute significantly to job retention. Future research clearly is needed to separate the involvement of supervisors and co-workers. Additionally, research that identifies supervisor involvement as a function of job type may be warranted. In this investigation, there were several differences between the responses of food service and light industrial supervisors. For example, food service supervisors indicated that they would consider some direct involvement in meetings that focused upon planning the type of support to be provided to target employees, whereas light industrial supervisors were undecided about or not willing to participate in individualized rehabilitation planning.

In summary, although only 10 supervisors were interviewed in this investigation, the results of these interviews provide

strong evidence of supervisor involvement in the long-term employment of employees with handicaps. This investigation suggests that job site supervisors are actively involved in training and evaluating target employees and that they would welcome professional consultation from employment specialists.

Author Notes

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Table 1.
Competitive Employment Activities and the Interview Questions Assessing Each Activity.

Job Placement

1. What factors do you believe are important in hiring a person with handicaps?
2. Would you welcome support from an employment training specialist?
3. Would you welcome a stringent re-evaluation of the requirements of the job in relation to the job description?
4. Who is the person to contact in order to find out more about a specific job?
5. What emphasis do you place on social-interpersonal skills in the workplace?

Job Site Training

6. Would you participate in the formation of the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan?
7. How have you modified the job to enhance employee performance?
8. How do you train your employees?
9. How have you used co-workers to help in training?
10. Would you allow direct training on the job which includes keeping records on employee performance?

Ongoing Assessment

11. How do you evaluate your employees?
12. Would you allow more frequent evaluations, for example, monthly?
13. Do you have the same expectations for all employees with similar job descriptions?
14. Would your nonhandicapped staff feel threatened if they knew they were being used as the "standard" for acceptability?

Follow-Along Supervision

15. What measures do you take to make sure that your employees continue to work hard and do what they were originally hired to do?
16. Do parents or friends and relatives ever assist target employees in any manner? For example, do they call to indicate absences? Do they provide transportation? Do they help the employee work the actual job? Do they pick up the employee's paycheck?

Table 2.
Employee Characteristics Considered Important by 10 Hiring Supervisors.

Employee Characteristics	Food Service	Light Industrial	Janitorial/ Maintenance	Warehouse	Total N	%
Presentation, Appearance	2	1	1	1	5	50
Interest in the Position, Motivation, Willingness	1	2	1	1	5	50
Good Social Skills, Pleasant, Cooperative, Good Manners	2	1	0	0	3	30
Punctuality	0	2	0	0	2	20
Background Skills, Work History, Good References	1	3	0	0	4	40
Hand Coordination	0	2	0	0	2	20
Availability of Hours, Flexible Schedule	0	0	0	1	1	10
Interview Skills (i.e., Eye Contact, Listening Skills)	0	1	0	0	1	10
Honesty	0	0	1	0	1	10
Need to Work	0	0	1	0	1	10

Table 3.
Task Modifications Made by Employers to Enhance Employee Performance.

Task Modifications	Food Service	Light Industrial	Janitorial/ Maintenance	Warehouse	Frequency	Percent
Redesign Position (i.e., Modify the number and types of job tasks that the employee performs)	1		2		3	30
Change Tasks (i.e., Allow the employee to change jobs within the employment setting)	2			1	3	30
Picture Schedules	1		1		2	20
Adjust Fixtures		1			1	10
Simplify Oral/Written Directions			1		1	10
Change Hours					1	10
Modify Setting						
Wheelchair Accessibility	2		1		3	30
Temperature Control (e.g., Cool Environment in Summer)	1				1	10
Comfortable Workplace	1				1	10

Table 4.
Percentage of Supervisors who Take the Described Measures to Make Sure that Employees Maintain Performance Standards

	Food Service	Light Industrial	Janitorial/ Maintenance	Warehouse	N	Percent
Retrain Employee	2		1		3	30
Monitor Job (quality, quantity)	1	1	1		3	30
Provide Daily Supervision	2				2	20
Provide Employee Recognition	1	1			2	20
No Specified Method		1		1	2	20
Arrange Employee Meetings			1		1	10
Institute Discipline Procedures			1		1	10
Provide Financial Incentives-Promotions	1				1	10
Provide Daily Schedule	1				1	10
Enter Peer Pressure	1				1	10
Talk to Employees	1				1	10